



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

STUDIES IN PALESTINIAN GEOGRAPHY.

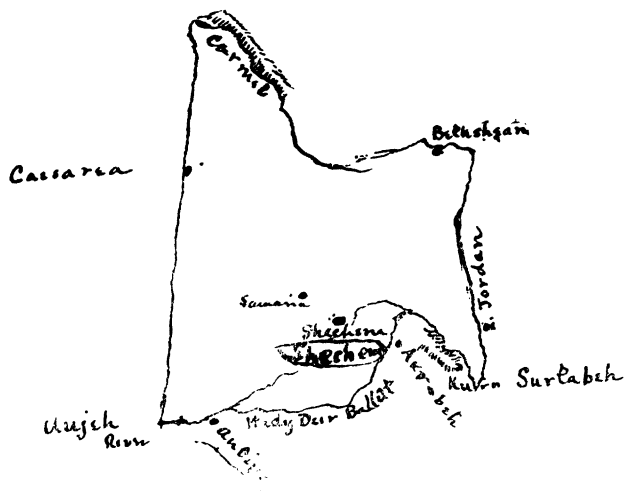
By REV. PROFESSOR J. S. RIGGS.
Auburn Theo. Seminary.

IV. SAMARIA.

Samaria's imperishable interest—Its physical configuration—Openness of the country—Fertility of the land—Views from Ebal and Gerizim—Historic spots and associations—Work of Palestine Exploration Society.

From the fact that the Land has its chief interest in its associations with our Lord, the traveler, as he turns his back upon Jerusalem to go northward, has generally in thought the hills and sea of Galilee. The vivid story of the Synoptic Gospels makes these the object of desire after Jerusalem. Samaria, with one possible exception, seems merely so much country to be passed over in order to reach Galilee. Before, however, the journey is finished, there is ample reason to acknowledge that this part of the land has its own imperishable interest on account of its physical configuration and consequent historical associations. If some of the identifications of the Palestine Fund explorers hold, New Testament events add their part to the long, varied record of scenes enacted amid the plains and on the hills of this region. We can do no better in entering the land than to follow the modern itinerary, for it carries us through the heart of the country and brings us face to face with its distinguishing marks. Over roads that are utterly unworthy of the name, we travel northward to Bethel, and the scenery is yet the same as that described in our study of Judea. Barren hills with narrow valleys and, here and there some cultivation, mark our way. We are still in the border-land. In a few hours, however, after leaving Bethel the scenery has more variation. The mountains are yet rugged, and the roads are stony enough, but the valleys begin to open. There are more olive groves. What looked from the coast like a solid wall of rock forming one continuous sky-line with the mountains of Judah, proves to be far less impenetrable and austere. We are coming into the home of the old tribes of Ephraim

and Manasseh. Josephus does, indeed, describe Samaria as "entirely of the same nature as Judea, since both countries are made up of hills and valleys," but the description is very general. It is the different disposition of hills and valleys which has so much to do with the peculiar history of this central portion. Samaria, Shechem, Bethshan—one must know the spots upon which they stood to appreciate fully their power and glory, their trials and disasters. The natural boundary between Judea and Samaria is the present Wâdy Deir Ballût—a water-course which rising at Akrabeh (the Accrabi of Josephus) runs westward in a deepening ravine and empties into the Anjeh river.¹ Eastward the boundary passed north of the Kurn Surtabeh ridge—the northern boundary of the lower Jordan plain—and ended at the Jordan. The northern boundary was the southern edge of the plain of Esdraelon and a line extending to the Jordan close to Bethshan or Scythopolis. The following outline will give the position of these marks:



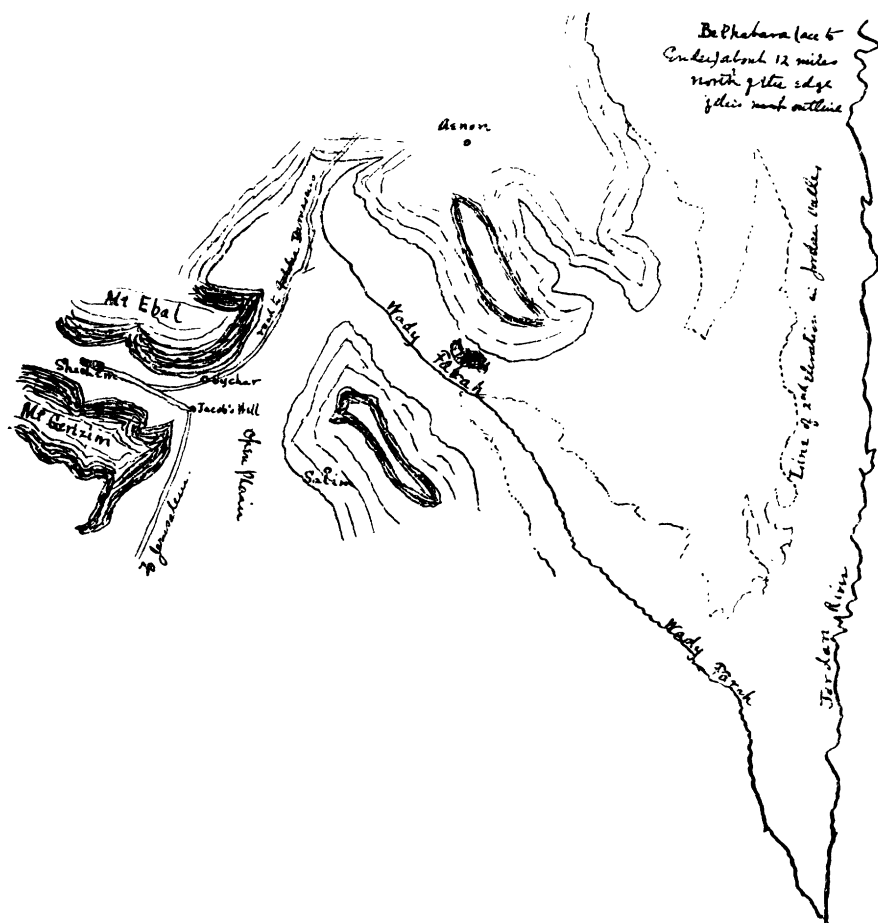
Within these boundaries, excluding Carmel, a space of 1,405 square miles was included. Prof. Smith, in his "Historical Geography of the Holy Land," has emphasized the "openness

¹Cf Quar. Statement Pal. Exp. Fund, 1876, p. 67.

of Samaria as compared with Judea. As the traveler comes out upon the broad valley leading up toward Shechem or enters the valley of the latter city itself, or rides about the great mound of Samaria this feature becomes very striking. The road from the southern boundary, of which we have spoken, to the northern frontier, is nearly all of it through these broad valleys, which are well tilled and very fruitful. With only little climbing one passes from plain to plain up through the whole land. It is an easy road by the way of the plain of Dothan through into the plain of Sharon. No steep defiles render perilous the entrance of an enemy from the east or the west, and the hills in many places slope gently to these plains. This feature of the land has had much to do with its troubled history. Take for instance the position of Shechem. It lies in a valley which sweeps up from the plain of Sharon past Samaria, and is thus open on the west. On the east the Wady Fârah opens in like manner a broad way to the Jordan. Beautiful as the position of the ancient city is, it is practically defenseless. Hence the choice of Tirzah, and Samaria and Jezreel as places of abode by the kings of Israel. About the strongholds in or near these broad valleys so liable to invasion have been enacted many of the most stirring scenes of the land's history. Samaria, on its mound some 300-500 feet above the broad valley in which it stood, both invited and resisted the attacks of armies from the east and the west.

At least three of these easily ascended valleys run down to the Jordan on the east, while the gentle descent of the hills on the west makes access to the plains behind them in no way difficult. When war departed from them they quickly responded to the hand of the husbandman, and gave to the land the appearance of great fertility. The picture is now vivid in the writer's memory of the field of grain that covered the plain east of Jacob's well; of the long lines of olive trees up the sides of the valleys and of the vineyard with their promise of rich fruitage. Samaria is a goodly land. We think of it, perhaps, too often as the home of the hated rival sect of the Jews, or it is linked with the memory of the extreme deeds of the Israelitish kings. Its very physical character made it, as one has said of it, "oftener

the temptation than the discipline, the betrayer than the guardian of its own," and so on one side the picture is of fair fields and fine olive groves; on the other of beleaguered cities and desolating struggles. The best point of view for a wide outlook over the land is from the top of Mount Ebal. Its towering summit reaches above the outline of the plateau seen from the coast, and tells one at that distance the position of Shechem, which for beauty and attractiveness is unsurpassed. Mount Ebal is 3,077 feet above the sea level, and 1,200 feet above the valley. What Neby Sammil is for a prospect over Judea, this noble mountain is for Samaria. On the north one can see to the high hills of Galilee on the left beyond the Sea of Galilee, and back of them the snowy height of Hermon; on the east beyond the Jordan gorge stretches the broad plateau of the Hauran; on the south are the mountain heights above Bethel; on the west the maritime plain with the flourishing cities of Ramleh, Ludd, and Jaffa, and beyond the blue sea. Nearly the same prospect can be had from Mount Gerizim, though it is not quite as full, as the mountain is some 200 feet lower. The places of historic interest are too numerous to note in an article of this length, but we must stop long enough to mark a few that have especial interest in connection with our Lord's ministry. Just below us in the valley is the site of Jacob's well—one of the two or three spots in the land where one can feel that he is actually upon a place made sacred by the known presence of our Lord. Dr. Thomson has called our attention to the very few places connected with the Master's life and work which can be positively identified. Tradition tries to mark the spot of every notable event, but, as if to render impossible at least, to intelligent pilgrims the temptation to idolatry of places, the exact position of nearly every one is obscured or lost. We must content ourselves with general views and fasten our thought rather upon Him. It is therefore with deep interest that one looks down into this deep well of Jacob; sits upon the curb and recalls that great discourse which fell upon the astonished ears of the Samaritan women. Jewish, Samaritan, Christian and Mohammedan tradition agree about the site and it remarkably



answers to all the demands of both the story of the Old Testament and that of the New. The well is now 75 feet deep but was much deeper, since the bottom is filled up for many feet with stones, thrown in by passing travelers. We had a drink of its cool refreshing water and coming to it about the same time of day "the sixth hour," after a long, warm ride we were able fully to enter into the description in John. One lifts the eye now upon the fields in the plain of Moreh giving promise of the harvest and imagination readily pictures the scene of the Samaritan woman, the wondering disciples and the curious people hurrying over from the near town of Sychar. This lies about half a mile away on the south east slope of Ebal. It is a simple enough picture, but what wide-reaching truth was declared that day by this humble well! Criticism in its eagerness to prove that John could not have written the fourth gospel thinks it finds indisputable proof here in this very scene for there is "a very significant mistake," we are told, about this town of Sychar. It is not known to us as in Samaria. Ever since the time of the Crusaders there has been confusion about the names Sichem and Sychar. But the early Christians placed Sychar a mile east of Shechem and Conder shows us how the Samaritan chronicle clears up the difficulty regarding the identification of the modern name "Askar" with that of Sychar.¹ Every consideration argues for the present identification, and here, as in other instances, it may turn out that John is accurate to a nicety in all he says concerning topography. At any rate here in this open valley under the slope of Gerizim with its Samaritan temple Christ declared that high truth about worship which shall yet do away with all exclusive temples and priestly ritual. This one spot has the deepest interest for the modern traveler and well it may. Its natural setting, its clear identity, its high associations give it worthy honor in the thoughts of all who are privileged to visit it. But there are possibly still earlier gospel associations in this region. If one looks up the valley to the north east, the eye falls upon the upper slope of the Wady Fârah which broadens and deepens as it flows toward the Jordan. There are copious

¹ See Quar. Statement Pal. Explor. Fund, 1877 p. 149.

springs in this valley and here has been located the place of John's baptizing mentioned in John 3:23: "And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there." The last phrase is manifestly a necessary part of the description. It certainly would be superfluous to speak in this way regarding the Jordan. Arnim (identified with Aenon) is about four miles north of the head-springs, and Salim three miles south. The proximity of these two places points to the Wady Fârah with its broad valley and abundance of water as the place where John sounded his trumpet call to repentance and baptized those who came. The common conception of John the Baptist's ministry is that it was near the wilderness and by the Jordan in the plains of Jericho. Thousands of pilgrims go each year to the supposed site of the baptism of Jesus across the plain from Jericho. Tradition has fixed upon this site and for all that we know it may be the true one, but in John 1:28 we are met with the puzzling statement that "these things," John's testimony and baptizing, were done in Bethabara (A. Vers.; Bethany, R. Vers.) beyond Jordan. Where was this Bethabara? Was this also in the plain of Jericho? The difficulty in that case is that Jesus was present on "the third day" in Cana would be obliged to accomplish a journey of at least 60 miles in one day. Captain Conder argues carefully for the site on the Jordan just above the entrance of the Nahr Jalud into the river. It is somewhat remarkable that the name "Abara" should cling to just this one ford of the Jordan. He suggests that "Bethany," the most approved reading may refer to Batanea on the east of the Jordan. The site cannot be accepted without question, but as placed it would well agree with the Scripture statements and show another important move in the active ministry of John the Baptist. There certainly is as yet no reason to hurry to the conclusion that the author of the fourth gospel is again making a mistake. We subjoin an outline which will give the relative position of these events recorded in John's gospel. They are worthy of study in view of the plausible criticism that tries to use them against John's authorship. These same valleys which have engaged our attention for a moment, saw at their early coming the glad hosts

of Israel and they might well rejoice in the land God had given them as they marked its springs and water courses, its fertile valleys and noble hills.. Here on these very mountains over Shechem, they listened to the reading of the law and echoed their earnest "amens" and then went forth to struggle for the mastery of the land.

Much interesting work has been done in Samaria by the Palestine Exploration society. It has supplemented the vivid description of intelligent travelers by careful detailed work and settled more than one important question. Were it not that it is more to our purpose to give a general idea of the land and its relations to the New Testament story, it were pleasant to linger about the interesting ruins of Bethshan in the valley of Jezreel; about Samaria with its broken columns and ruined church; about Gerizim with its manifold sites Samaritan and Christian; about Antipatris, Cæsarea, Megiddo and other places rich in history. That history, as we have said before, is but a reflection of the conditions of the land itself. In her stern mountains, Judea held her own and waited the coming of her Lord; Samaria heard over and over the tramp of foreign armies and was in possession of a "mixed" race when the Star rose over Bethlehem, but in her midst was declared the truth which is yet to break down all dividing lines forever.